

# THERAPEUTIC STORIES BETWEEN EVALUATION AND INTERVENTION IN FAMILY AND CHILD SOCIAL WORK

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## **Abstract**

The paper proposes to unravel stories as an alternative method in social work intervention by featuring stories as an instrument of evaluation, an intervention technique, a way of creating a therapeutic atmosphere and, not least, as a linchpin for change.

Each story has a “moral” conveyed in various ways; sometimes it is visible, some other times it is disguised or barely insinuated. This value of stories makes them usable in family and child social work: they have an exploratory role, of understanding a situation, of describing a process experienced by families and children or that they will experience, or of finding a solution for a particular situation. Stories must be adapted to the life situation of child and family; they may even be used in the adoption process, to explain to a child what adoption means. They may also be used in the field of foster care, to show the role of foster families and of the biological family, in the process of placing a child in a foster care centre. They may also be used when a child experiences conflicting moments.

**Keywords:** life story, therapeutic stories, social work

## **Résumé**

Le travail vise à attirer l'attention sur les histoires en tant qu'alternative à l'intervention dans le travail social à travers la présentation d'histoires comme instrument d'évaluation, d'intervention technique, de création de l'atmosphère thérapeutique et, enfin, de reliure changeante.

Chaque histoire a une “morale” qui est transmise de différentes manières, parfois elle est visible, parfois elle est déguisée, cachée, et à d'autres moments à peine insinuée. Cette valeur des histoires leur permet d'être utilisées dans l'aide sociale à la famille et à l'enfant avec un rôle exploratoire, de comprendre une situation, de décrire une famille et un processus d'enfant qu'elles vont traverser, ou trouver une solution pour une situation particulière. Les histoires doivent être adaptées à la situation de vie de l'enfant et de la famille et peuvent être utilisées dans le processus d'adoption pour expliquer à un enfant ce que signifie l'adoption ou pour révéler l'adoption; dans le processus de soins maternels, pour montrer le rôle de la famille d'accueil et de la famille biologique; dans le processus de placement dans des unités de protection ou lorsque l'enfant traverse des moments conflictuels.

**Mots-clés:** histoire de vie, récits thérapeutiques, assistance sociale

## **Rezumat**

Lucrarea își propune să aducă în atenție poveștile, ca alternativă în intervenția din asistența socială printr-o prezentare a poveștilor ca instrument de evaluare, tehnică de

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intervenție, modalitate de creare a atmosferei terapeutice și, nu în ultimul rând, liant în schimbare.

Fiecare poveste are o „morală” care se transmite în diferite moduri, uneori este vizibilă, alteori este deghizată, ascunsă, iar alteori abia insinuată. Această valoare a poveștilor face ca ele să poată fi folosite în asistența socială a familiei și a copilului cu rol explorator, de înțelegere a unei situații, de descriere a unui proces parcurs de familie și copil, sau pe care aceștia urmează să îl parcurgă, sau de găsire a unei soluții pentru o situație particulară. Poveștile trebuie adaptate situației de viață a copilului și familiei putând fi utilizate în procesul de adopție, pentru a explica unui copil ce înseamnă adopția, sau pentru a dezvălui adopția; în procesul de asistență maternală, pentru a arăta rolul familiei de plasament și al familiei biologice; în procesul de plasament în unități de ocrotire sau atunci când copilul traversează momente conflictuale.

**Cuvinte cheie:** povestea vieții, povești terapeutice, asistență socială

### “Once upon a time ...”

In traditional communities, stories played a central role in people’s lives. The perennial elements of life were conveyed through stories. Stories told from one generation to another transmitted durable values and teachings about profoundly lived lives. Traditional stories followed an eternal and universal pattern. This pattern has many versions: birth – death – rebirth, separation – initiation – return or beginning – disorder – resolution. The community elders were the main persons to convey the values and wisdom through stories (Atkinson 2006).

Folk stories are part of collective memory, of what Jung calls the collective unconscious, and they have a set of archetypal narrative schemes. According to Bădescu, participation to stories (2014) is the framework in which and through which the individual and human collectives may benefit from categorial-archetypal functions of the spirit.

Stories may also be seen as carriers of tradition, as “cross-cultural transmitters”, in the opinion of Peseschkian (2005). They reflect culturally accepted behavioural rules, concepts, and norms. Their contents confer safety and they suggest solutions accepted within a culture. Stories from various areas bring elements accepted in various cultures, thus managing to reduce prejudices. They comprise not only a cultural baggage, but also religious beliefs, rituals, and interpretations of the world. Conveyed orally or in writing, stories have their place in the cultural heritage. The story is for everybody – old people, adults, children – while the manner of conveying the message of the story is ritualized.

Over time, stories have been used for teaching life lessons to adults. This function was intertwined with pleasure and amusement. People met in cafés and in special salons for storytelling or for family reunions. Some stories were narrated; other ones were sung or dramatically represented. Stories responded to a need of information, identification, and support for treating life issues (Peseschkian 2005).

Initially elaborated as an entertaining means for the adults, stories also became part of the literature for children as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was due partially to itinerant peddlers who travelled from village to village; they sold household wares, sheet music and affordable volumes called “cheap books” that contained drastically edited folktales<sup>1</sup>, legends, and fairytales simplified to appeal to less instructed people. The chapmen realized that children had their own interests; hence, they developed the market of fairytales for children (Cashdan, 2009).

In a story, the action is narrated by the narrator, who relates in a logical, temporal sequence a life experience, a problem situation, a state of fact, in which participants to action (namely the characters of the story) help conveying the message and finding a solution. A bilateral relationship exists between the one who transmits and the one who receives, between the narrator and the listener; feedback is a basic element of this relationship. Seen as an instrument in communication, but equally as a process, the story reveals emotions, hidden feelings; it focuses on the mental action of the listeners, the struggle between their own urges and the demands of the outer world, between their own rules and the rules of society, between the ego and the other.

The story, through the narrator, proposes a framework for action, a basis for the course, a problem, a dilemma, a conflict. The listener uses the framework individually, according to their own values, beliefs, emotions,

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<sup>1</sup> The folktale named story, fairytale, legend, *snoavă* represents one of the oldest species of oral literature, signalled since antiquity and encountered among all people in a great number of versions. It is a folk narration with fantastic, supernatural elements, which symbolizes the forces of good and evil in the struggle for and against man's happiness (DEX 1998, 86). Also called story and narration, in Romanian the folktale focuses on a double codification of the communicated world, a double line of semantic unfolding. The first orders the story, the narration by the Latin code (*narare* – relating, narrating, saying, dedicating), while the second by the Slavonic code (*povestire* - after *vestire*, afterwards). One (the Latin one) derives from *illo tempore*, from the original living, while the other from a delay, from “afterwards”, *postfestum*. In Romanian, there are always two registers of meaning, which unfold two stories (narrations) of the meaning, thus describing two types of behaviours (Bădescu 2014).

behaviours in their mental construct of solving the situation. The story makes the listener think about solutions, find resources for change.

Stories unfold in an imaginary time and space, where everything we wish can come true (“once upon a time...”). They have a central theme, namely the life of a hero and contents, a framework where the main hero (as he faces the challenges of life) realizes his special qualities and powers, thus becoming the hero of his own life (“and he lived happily ever after ...”).

### ***Change through the story***

As an element of folk therapy, stories dealt with inner conflicts long before psychotherapy became a scientific discipline. The best-known example is the collection of stories called “One Thousand and One Nights”, where Scheherazade uses stories to treat the sick sultan and the readers or listeners at the same time using stories. The listeners of the stories keep in mind the contents of the stories, they learn teachings and they incorporate them in their own thoughts (Peseschkian 2005, 32-33).

The story is a means for learning, an instrument favouring emotional ventilation, the acknowledgement and expression of emotions, a linchpin between the problem experienced at a personal level and the message of the story.

The story is the foundation of revelation, of insight, of the inner “aha”, emerged as a response to the individual problem and indicated to everybody, regardless of age, instruction level or training. The story does not attack; through its content, it addresses the person indirectly, “as if”, and the subject acknowledges the problem in the story. It leaves room for personal beliefs to lead to problem-solving, acting in relation to the beliefs of the listener, who takes healing elements from the story. The story is a communication means addressing to the same extent to both the conscious and the unconscious of the listener, as also featured in Erickson, who unravels a magical world with problems like in the real world and always with a resolution.

The force of stories consists of disciplining, stirring emotions, inspiring, changing, creating mind–body skills, healing. (Burns, 2012)

However, the story is not a universal panacea; it may and sometimes must be associated with other techniques; it must be said at the right time and moment and mostly under the right form.

## **Why the story in social work ?**

Emerged in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, social work has a particular specific among current professions; it has evolved continually in order to respond to the multiple challenges raised by the issues of an ever-changing society. The interwar evolution of social work as a profession places Romania among the innovative countries in Europe in that period; Romanian social work education benefited, on one hand, from the valuable contribution of the sociological School in Bucharest, and on the other, the specialization in the USA of some teaching staff members who founded the first social works. The same thing can be noted after 1989: the first measure for reconstructing the social work system is to prepare the necessary human resources, the social workers, and the social work trainers.

Because it is a profession of many faces (Sheafor, Morales, Scott 2011) but also a socially constructed profession (Payne 2011), social work acquires distinct notes from one society to another, from a historical and from a geographical, social, economic, political and cultural standpoint. Social work was influenced by various social, political and theoretical circumstances, which determined a constant modification of functions and practices in general. Because it is a rather new profession evolving and changing at a fast pace, social work must respond to the multiple challenges concerning the quality of professional training and the quality of provided services, implicitly (Rădoi, Irimescu 2017).

Therefore, the role of social workers must not be reduced to crisis interventions, especially in the field of child and family and to the granting of benefits and services with short-term impact or of social services. Actually, it is necessary to highlight the importance of specialized training in fields like systemic family therapy or family art-therapy.

Social work and family therapy have evolved and developed together in the social field; social work is one of the starting points for family therapy, while family therapy has developed over time models addressing to families in difficulty, to poor families and to families requesting social services (Irimescu 2009).

By developing as a distinct entity, family therapy ended up creating models similar with not only intervention in social work, but which also address directly to the beneficiaries of social services.

Social workers such as Virginia Satir, Lynn Hoffman, Betty Carter, Monica McGoldrick and Peggy Papp, etc in the United States of America, Michael White in Australia, John Burnham, Gill Gorell Barnes and Bary

Mason in Great Britain, etc, founded and developed new approaches in family therapy (Carr 2006).

Family therapy and social work, as distinct areas of knowledge and intervention, have been interconnected and influenced mutually over time. One of the techniques used in family therapy is the story, a working instrument “wooded” and claimed by ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, pedagogues, therapists, a technique that also found an echo in social work.

The story acquires different forms, from the story read to the one featured in opera, ballet, theatre or graphic representation, to life story interview, to the problem-saturated story within narrative therapy. All these forms of story representation may be encountered in various stages of the assistance process in social work. Within the assistance process, the story can be an instrument of evaluation, a technique for creating the assistance relationship and for stimulating empathy, as well as an intervention method. In addition, the stages of a story and the stages of the assistance process in family and child social work have common structural elements.

Usually, stories have the following structure: they begin by presenting the characters and the precarious balance situation, followed by the central phase – the crisis – where the problem representing the core of the story is presented as clearly as possible. Subsequently, protagonists are presented (the one who has to do all the action), the allies (characters, animals, objects helping the protagonist accomplish his/her mission), the enemies (personal, objects, circumstances, obstacles for the mission). There are also various possible solutions for solving the crisis. The story ends with the presentation of a new state of balance, more stable and satisfaction bringing than the initial one. By covering these phases, the story can be understood as the passage from a precarious balance instituted by the emergence of the problem to a new, more stable balance (Santagostino 2008, 15-16).

The assistance process in social work has been submitted to many adjustments and readjustments over time. More recently, it comprises as follows: taking over the case, initial evaluation, detailed evaluation, intervention (i.e. planning services, providing services, monitoring, and re-evaluation) and case finalization. For a family going through a crisis, the stages of the assistance process may be the following. The first is the initial phase (focusing on the crisis, on the “here and now”, on the emotional state, on the events leading to the emergence of the crisis, on the assessment of disorders determined by the crisis, on priorities). The second is the middle phase (collecting data and obtaining missing information, clarifying

information, selecting essential discussion topics, behavioural changes and assessing the learning mechanisms of new behaviours in the area of interest, determining the purpose, establishing the specific objectives, combining the cognitive and the behavioural tasks). The third is the final phase (assessing the progress made, reviewing the most important discussed topics, reviewing the tasks, the objectives and the extent to which they were attained, planning for the future). During a crisis, a family reacts by their own possibilities of solving the problem, trying to restore the former balance or to reach a new one that may be qualitatively superior, inferior or at the same level with the initial one (Irimescu 2008).

The similarities between the two – the story and the assistance process – in terms of structure and process dynamic encourage us to find supporting elements, of interaction, common or differentiating elements. Hence, both use the word as an instrument in evaluation and intervention; in both of them, telling a story and telling your story are key elements in the evolution towards problem solving; both empower the main character to overcome the crisis and both end by finding solutions. It must be noted that the story is part of the assistance process; it acquires different forms, but it has the same structural organization as the whole: describing the problem, the crisis, and finding solutions.

### ***The story as an instrument of communication***

The exposing narrative forms, events, experiences or developments – in most life situations – means telling a story. Storytelling is a fundamental form of interhuman communication. When we tell a story, we exercise self-knowledge, we discover new significations, we reflect upon events, experiences, feelings, and the result is a story. Stories have many of the important characteristics of effective communications: they are interactive, they educate through attraction, they reduce resistance to change, they develop problem-solving skills and they create possibilities for attaining objectives; they invite to independent decision making (Burns 2011, 38).

The story, in the assistance process, is told, not read; it narrates, while the tone of voice, the intensity, the amplitude, the mimic and the gestures are especially important. The story must be, according to Paşca (2004), the linchpin between body and soul, between thought and gestures, living and expressing. The word within the story has a magical story, the same author states; it can cure when told where, how and by whom it should. The story cannot be told but in symbiosis with the listener.

Milton Erickson, the famous school founder and therapist, said the following about symbiosis: People come and listen to me telling them stories, and then they go home and change their behaviour. The same author makes the listener look in himself/herself the resources for change by using an introductory, action-provoking expression. “There are a few things that you know, without knowing that you do. When you know what you do not know, you will change” (Pașa 2004).

The story thus said has an echo at the level of personal beliefs, through a constructive reaction of knowledge and self-knowledge, thus triggering a change in resonance with personal values.

### ***Telling a story – telling your story***

Telling your story, telling a story about yourself in the assistance process in family and child social work is part of the evaluation stage.

Atkinson (2006) said, “If we want to know the unique experience and perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in the person’s own voice”. Life story represents the complete narrative of life experience, by underscoring the most important aspects, events, experiences. The life story interview is the result of an interview directed by someone else, mostly an interdisciplinary approach, used for understanding not only a single life situation but also the way individual lives interact with each other; it is the story of one’s own evolution in time, throughout the cycle of individual and family life. The aforementioned author compares life story interview with a travel to unknown areas or to already familiar realms. Through its contents, the life story interview must respond to a few questions regarding the structure, perceptions, individual or family processes, to clarify the links between the past and the future, to provide meaning to one’s own life.

One of the most important uses of life story is the therapeutic purpose. Life story, storytelling, recounting again the life experiences offer the occasion of new narratives and help the clients identify details of their lives, interaction patterns, clarify reactions, emotions, interpret past experiences and use them for educational purposes (White, Epsom 1990; Atkinson 2006).

### ***The image in the mirror***

In the problem-exploring stage, the function exercised by the story is the one of mirroring your own image, your own problem in the story. The



images triggered by the story in the mind of the listener are charged with personal significations. The image in the mirror provides the possibility of analyzing the problem from a distance, of creating an emotional distance from the problem. The same thing happens in the narrative approach: we see the problem from the outside; we separate the problem from the person. The story activates an unexpected richness of images; it is possible to model the message conveyed by and from the listener. The story becomes a mirror that reflects and can be reflected.

### ***The story – a bridge for creating a therapeutic alliance and for developing empathizing skills***

The story is a bridge for creating a therapeutic alliance, a healing process by providing a feeling of security and by maintaining a positive emotional state. Through its imaginary character, by placing the action in a time and space outside the real one, “once upon a time ...”, the story places from the beginning the listener to another level of information processing. The word creates a relationship between the listener and the storyteller; this relationship has an interactive character, providing security by identifying with the story of the main hero, by finding solutions and solving problems by discovering the inner force. Through the relationship created, the listener transforms from a passive receptor into an involved receptor, thus assuming the responsibility of his own change. The narrated word transforms from a communication means into a communicational process. Reconstructed space becomes the space for outlining the borders of a new reality where, by communication, one rewrites a life situation.

This newly created space is the easiest to see among children; they access them easier through a story, thus favouring the access to fears, conflicts, and new life situations. By accompanying the child in his/her investigative approach, the parent may experience a parallel process. In the changing process, the parent may start from the position of observer of the child’s safety space through the story, and he/she may end up as part of the child’s story. The story creates a safety space for both the child and the parent; furthermore, it helps the parent start an empathetic relationship with the child.

### ***The story – the path towards change***

In professions providing assistance, stories are used to support clients evaluate their problems, attain their goals and heal within the assistance

process. Here, stories become therapeutic stories, deliberately formulated stories, by respecting certain rules and stages, stories based on an effective communication, with a relevant content for the needs of the beneficiary and uttered with the artistry of a good storyteller.

The main purpose of therapeutic stories is to make the interlocutor highlight certain aspects of the problematic situation of the character and provide solving possibilities. By identifying with the main character, with the hero of the story, the interlocutor can identify and develop strategies for solving his own life situations. He/she may pass from the problem-saturated story to a story of success, using the analogy with the therapeutic story. The therapeutic story does not criticize; it does not label; it does not impose change; it does not create resistance. Using a different kind of language, namely a metaphorical one, it transposes the situation within the story towards the interlocutor, thus providing solutions indirectly. The extent to which solutions are actually valued depends on the interlocutor.

Stories used in the problem-solving field may be stories with a happy ending – with the following structure: presentation of the problem, elaboration of the framework/ action and presentation of the solution. The story, the characters, the events, the places must address to the listener using a familiar language. In order to function therapeutically, the story must create “the portion of phenomenological reality” where the child experiences the world created through metaphor (Gordom 1978; Mitrofan 1997).

Another category is represented by stories with an open ending, which comprise only the first two elements of the story with a happy ending: presentation of the problem and of the action framework; during the meeting, the child and/ or the parent should find solutions to the problem proposed. The solution found can be expressed in writing, drawn or interpreted. The listener, who becomes a character in the story, will choose the manner of showing the end of the story.

Both children and parents may be invited to create their own story. The story, or made up tale according to Santagostino (2008, 96) provides some kind of precise, complete and detailed “photography” of the narrator’s inner struggles. Furthermore, it provides a moving image, a movie depicting the forces within the game and the relationships between them, the problem in its dynamic and the solving process – where, when and how one arrived in the deadlock. The author compares the details provided in the made up tale by the person in crisis with the result of a radiological or laboratory medical investigation. As they reveal elements that were not observed directly, the invented story brings to light elements that the verbal communication would not have managed to highlight.

For both children and parents, the story invented by them will have two roles. The first is exploratory, unveiling anguishes, wishes, conflicts, unsolved states. The second is therapeutic, by introducing new characters, by modifying the action and by finding solutions. Used in child and family social work as the final part of another technique, namely the book of life, the invented story provides details concerning problems, current crises, and future projections. Encouraging children and parents to write, to invent a story is nothing less than inviting them to explore new situations, to cross the border between conscious and unconscious and to find there forgotten solutions for current problems.

Narratives use in the social work for children in difficulty may have an exploratory role, of understanding a situation, of describing a process experienced by the child or that he is about to experience. Narratives must be adapted to the life situation of the child and they may be used in the process of adoption, in order to explain to a child what adoption means or to unravel adoption in maternal assistance process. They may also be useful to show the role of foster family and of the biological family; they are also of use when the child experiences conflicting moments. Narratives, just like stories, respect the same structure: presentation of the situation, of the characters, description of the context, of the crisis and exposition of positive solutions and of the happy ending.

Through the story, family and child manage to understand the available options and to replace the narrow, destructive or self-destructive solutions chosen by them with others, which they had not considered before. The alternative solutions presented provide them a broader action spectrum, a moral, a lesson derived from the story.

Gardner proposes the “mutual storytelling technique”, where initially he asks the child to tell a story. Paying attention to the atmosphere and framework of the story, to the child’s emotional reactions, to the figures representing the child, to significant characters, he then says his own story. He starts from the same characters, atmosphere, and initial solutions, but he provides a better solution to the most important conflicts (Mitrofan 1997, 177). The alternative solutions provided to the child show him/her a broader action spectrum, a moral, a lesson derived from the story.

For the story to attain its purpose the narrator must create through the story a beneficial learning experience for the listener; the story must be dedicated to the listener and it must not be told like a random reality or like a power game. The story must be relevant for the listener and for the manner of using it. The story must be told in order to provide to the listener

significant therapeutic experience, specific to assistance, adequate for his problems. For the narrator, observation is an important and necessary technique. Attention will be oriented towards the signs of disinterest and lack of attention shown by the listener, towards the impact produced by the message conveyed through the story. If it does not help, the story may be stopped (Burns 2012).

## Conclusions

Over time and in all cultures, stories have been related using words, music, and movement. Stories were transmitted orally from generation to generation; they were printed, filmed and preserved under various forms. Stories have the force of uniting relationships (listener narrator/ listener – a character from the story), of educating and of healing.

Stories respect a certain structure: presentation of the situation, of the characters, description of the context, of the crisis and exposition of positive solutions and of the happy ending.

Stories accomplish a series of functions, among mirroring the personal needs, problems and emotions of the listener, mediating the relationship created between narrator and listener and modelling through versions of suggested solutions. At the same time, stories have an educative role (they offer life models, attitudes, positive reactions) and they reduce resistance to change (the solution is not imposed but discovered through analogy). In addition, they develop problem-solving skills (by presenting alternatives and stimulating creativity), they create possibilities for attaining the objectives (being adapted to the personal needs of the listener) and they favour personal decision-making.

Stories can be used for teaching life lessons to adults (Annex), thus responding to their need of information, identification, and support for treating life issues. For children, stories are more than the mere entertainment of an imaginary adventure. Their long-term value consists of helping them face their inner conflicts throughout the growing process. Moreover, each story has a “moral” conveyed in various ways; sometimes it is visible, some other times it is disguised or barely insinuated. Through the story, the child faces the problem using a new view; with the help of the story, he/she manages to find new solutions, not imposed from the outside, but discovered through association and introspection.

The story is a creative technique that connects the narrator and the listener, but also each person to himself/herself.

The similarities between the two – the story and the assistance process – in terms of structure and process dynamic encourage us to find supporting elements, of interaction, common or differentiating elements. Hence, both use the word as an instrument in evaluation and intervention; in both of them, telling a story and telling your story are key elements in the evolution towards problem solving; both empower the main character to overcome the crisis and both end by finding solutions. It must be noted that the story is part of the assistance process; it acquires different forms, but it has the same structural organization as the whole: describing the problem, the crisis, and finding solutions.

Within the assistance process, the story is a learning means, an instrument favouring emotional ventilation, the acknowledgement and expression of emotions, a linchpin between the problem experienced at a personal level and the message of the story. In addition, the story is an instrument in communication, but equally a process. The story reveals emotions, hidden feelings; it focuses on the mental action of the listeners, the struggle between their own urges and the demands of the outer world, between their own rules and the rules of society, between the ego and the other.

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## Annex

### *The Importance of Stories*

This tale begins in the reign of a king who loved stories with such passion that he brought the most famous storytellers from all over the world to his kingdom. Each night they would tell their tales, both familiar and new, to the king and his court. As you might imagine, dealing with affairs of the state all day long was a tedious activity and listening to an evening tale helped the king unwind, but therein lay a problem. He would relax too much and inevitably fall asleep before the tale was completed. As everyone knows, this is a sign of disrespect and the source of bad omen.

The king's habit angered the Goddess of Stories who felt humiliated and insulted that the king, of all people, regularly breached the etiquette of listening to stories. How could he or his people live happily without completed stories?

Deciding to warn the king, the goddess appeared in a dream to his prime minister, cautioning that the king should listen to stories in their totality, or not listen at all. The prime minister told the king about his dream, and the king vowed to stay awake. Nonetheless, during the story that very night, his mind began to drift, his eyelids started to droop, and soon was asleep.

The prime minister, anticipating wrath from the Goddess of Stories, asked the storytellers to change the pace of their tales, raise the volume of their voices or increase the level of excitement at any sign of the king drifting off to sleep, but, again, all failed. The Goddess of Stories was furious for the king had ignored her warning. She had been generous and tolerant, but this added insult to injury.

Once again she manifested herself in the prime minister's dreams. "The king continues to disrespect stories," she said. "He does not hear their messages and, consequently, cannot incorporate their teachings into his life or set a good example for his people. If he persists in insulting stories, he will have to die, and, as the deity of stories, it is my role to punish him. I will add poison to his breakfast the morning after he next falls asleep during a story. If that does not work, I will cause a tree branch to fall on him and strike him dead. If, for any reason, that doesn't work, then I will send a venomous snake to attack him."

But the Goddess' caution did not end there. As the king had already had sufficient warnings, if the prime minister told the king of his impending fate, then he, the faithful servant, would be turned into stone.

What a conflict! His death or his beloved king's! Hopefully he could prevent both. He tried every tactic to keep his sovereign awake, but that night, the king once again fell asleep before the story ended.

The next morning the prime minister subtly swapped his own breakfast for the king's and saved his ruler's life. That evening he again tried to prevent the king from slumbering, but to no avail. The next day, as the king seated himself on a bench in his garden, the prime minister carefully studied the overhanging tree. As soon as the branch above began to creak and fall, he dived on the monarch, pulling him to safety and once more saved his life. The king was grateful, but the prime minister could not explain his actions or advise the king of the fate still to befall him.

That night, as the unreformed king began to nod out during the story, the prime minister crept into the royal bed chamber and hid behind a curtain. The faithful servant maintained his vigil after the king and queen had retired. Just as the Goddess of Stories had predicted, a lethal snake slid into the room and up onto the regal bed. It raised itself, about to strike, but the prime minister struck first. With a clean swing of his sword, he cut off his head.

At that moment the king awoke, saw the prime minister with his sword drawn, and interpreted it as an assassination attempt.

The minister was sentenced to death and, while sitting in his cell awaiting execution realized that he would die no matter what he did. So, wishing to do so with his reputation of loyalty intact, the prime minister told the king the true story behind his actions. He had barely completed the last word before he turned into stone.

The king was struck with grief and guilt. He made a vow that he would never again fall asleep, or stop listening, during the telling of a story. He encouraged his people to He encouraged his people to show respect for stories, storytellers, and, in turn, the Goddess of Stories. They were to listen, not just to the words, but to the message, and, just as they were to respect the telling of the tale, so they were to use the messages, respectfully, in their lives.

*(Folktale from Nepal, Burns 2012, 33-36)*